

Congress and all the people in our administration team who did that—and all of you who helped us throughout all these long years in the good and the bad times.

Politics is about values and ideas and actions and whether they change people's lives or not. So the first thing I just want to say to all of you who have been with us all the time, you ought to feel pretty good out here—not just because this is a beautiful day in a beautiful place but this is a different country than it was.

The second thing I want to say is we have to decide two things in the next year and a half. We have to decide what are we going to do right now with our prosperity, with our surplus, and what decisions will we make in the next election cycle about where we go.

I had a very interesting question in the press conference earlier this week. Susan Page said, "Well, Mr. President, your approval ratings are back up after Kosovo and you won the war, and it's very strong approval ratings, but this question was asked our voters: 'Do you want to vote for someone who will just continue the President's policies, or someone who will change policies?' And someone who will change policies won 50 to 38."

And I said, "Well Susan, if they polled me, I'd have been in the 50 percent, too, because our country is about continuous renewal." And I had to spend the last 6 years trying to make sure this country could work again. Now that things are working well, the question is what kind of change are we going to have—not whether we'll change—are we going to build on what we've done and go beyond it, or are we going to go back to things that didn't work before in the blind hope that they will?

And I'll just give you a couple of examples. First of all, in the moment. The big debate in Washington is, what do we do with the surplus. Well, let me say this. We produced a balanced budget in 1997 by cutting spending rigorously and saying we would keep these caps in place by 5 years, and by continuing to grow the economy by getting interest rates down and investment up. Now, so we now have this projected surplus. But you should also know that we have an enormous number of teaching hospitals in cities

throughout America, for example, saying we need to put more money in the Medicare program to take care of the health care systems in the country.

I believe that we should be investing more, not less, in education, the environment, and biomedical research. I don't think we should cut back. And perhaps most important, I think this gives us a chance to meet the challenge of the aging of America and the challenge of giving this country a long-term pattern for growth. And let me just address those briefly.

The number of people over 65 is going to double in the next 30 years. There are going to be fewer people working and more people retired. Social Security is going to run out of money in 2034; Medicare is going to run out of money in 2015. I think we ought to set aside most of the surplus to save Social Security; to save and modernize Medicare; to add more preventive tests for osteoporosis and cancer and other things to try to keep people out of the hospital in the first place; to add a prescription drug benefit that is modest, but will be very helpful to 75 percent of the people who are over 65 who don't have adequate drug coverage; and to do it in a way that would allow us to become, for the first time since—listen to this—1835, debt-free.

Now, why should the liberal party, the more liberal party, be for making America debt-free? Because in 1999 and in 2000 and from now on, in a global economy, when money travels across national borders at the speed of light, interest rates are set in a global environment. And if a wealthy country is out of debt, it means that the people who live in that wealthy country can borrow money at lower cost, which means there will be more investment, more jobs, higher wages, lower car payments, lower credit card payments, lower home mortgage payments, lower college loan payments, and higher economic growth over a longer period of time.

It also means that when a global economy gets in trouble, as Asia got in trouble, Russia got in trouble, and our friends and trading partners and people we hope will remain democracies need money, they can get the money they need at lower cost because we won't be out there taking it away from them.

And I think it is an unbelievable opportunity, and we can do it.

The point I want to make to you is, the Republicans are trying to cast the debate in Washington today as “our tax cut is bigger than your tax cut.” It’s almost like the arguments we used to have when I was in school—[laughter]—“our tax cut is bigger than your tax cut.” Well, if that’s the choice, you know, that’s a pretty hard deal to argue with. The question is, if you take our tax cut, which is smaller than theirs, you get to save Social Security and Medicare; you get to take the country out of debt; you get to continue to invest in education, environment, medical research.

If they get their budget through, we will do nothing to extend the life of Medicare, nothing to extend the life of Social Security. We will imperil the future stability of the country, therefore. We will pay down the debt, but we won’t pay off. And we will actually have to have drastic cuts in the investments in education, in the environment, in medical research, and believe it or not, even in defense.

Now, that’s what’s going on here. And what I want to ask you is, after all—this debate couldn’t even occur if we all had a clear memory of what this country was like in 1991 and 1992. The Democrats are being punished for our success.

Can you imagine—why is the first issue the size of the tax cut, before we really assess how much we have to give these hospitals to make them whole? Did we tell them too much, and if we did, shouldn’t we fix it? What does it take to fix Social Security and Medicare? What does it take to get us out of debt? What does it take to fulfill our basic responsibilities? Then why don’t we talk about the tax cut?

In Washington, it’s all backwards again. And one of the young men who works for me said, “Mr. President, this is like a family sitting down around a table and saying, ‘Let’s plan the vacation of our dreams to Hawaii, and when we get back we’ll see if we can make the mortgage payments and send the kids to college.’” I mean, this is—it doesn’t make sense.

So the Democratic Party again is telling the American people, remember what got us

to where we are. Do we need change? Absolutely. And we have a plan—and I talked about it in my radio address today—to save Social Security and Medicare, to make the country debt-free, to continue to invest in education and the environment, to literally make this the safest big country in the world early in the next century. And none of it can be done if their idea prevails.

So I think we ought to have a big debate about it. And if we look to the future—I just want to echo one thing Roy said—I’m convinced the more I think about it and the longer I live, and I’m not running for anything anymore, that the biggest difference between the two parties today is the way we think of community. It’s not whether some of us are warmhearted and others are cold-blooded. It’s not whether some of us are nice people and others aren’t nice. It’s whether we believe down deep inside that those of us who are pretty fortunate would be better off if everybody else did better and that we’ll be not only sort of morally satisfied, but actually better off if we try to go forward together in a country where there’s opportunity for every responsible citizen and in which everybody has a place in our community.

And I’ll just give you a few examples of that where their party genuinely disagrees with us, from top to bottom, from all the candidates to all the Congressmen. The Patients’ Bill of Rights—I supported—unlike some people, I supported managed care, but only if the people didn’t have to give up quality of care. I think it is unconscionable that a person in a managed care plan could have a doctor pleading for the person to go to see a specialist and some non-physician could block it for long enough to make the damage irrevocable.

I think it is unconscionable that in cities every day somebody gets hit by a car and has to go to an emergency room, and has to drive by the nearest one to one, two or three down the way because that’s the one covered by the plan. I think it is wrong for a person working for a small business who has cancer and is in the middle of chemotherapy, or who is pregnant and having a difficult pregnancy, to have to change their doctor in the middle of the treatment because the employer has changed his coverage.

Why? It doesn't affect me. I'm the President; I have great health care. It doesn't affect you. Most of you have got—you can pay for whatever you need. So why are you here? Because we feel that our country is better if more people are healthy and if people are treated fairer.

I'll give you another example—it may not be popular in all parts of Colorado. I grew up in a State where half the people had a hunting or fishing license or both. But I think that we did the right thing to pass the Brady bill. I think we did the right thing to pass the assault weapon ban. And I think Dianne Feinstein did the right thing to pass the assault weapons ban and then keep trying to close all the loopholes in it.

Why is that? Because I think—not because I don't think people ought to be able to hunt or go to sporting events, but because I think that all of us ought to be willing to make reasonable compromises for the safety of the society as a whole, just like we do when we walk through an airport metal detector. You know, it didn't take too many planes to be hijacked before nobody screamed anymore when they walked through an airport metal detector, "You are interfering with my constitutional right to travel."

Now, think about it. This is crazy. So look at the fight in Washington. All of them, from the candidates to the Congress, were against closing the gun show loophole. We don't do background checks at gun shows and urban flea markets where a lot of criminals buy guns. And we have the technology to do it with very minor inconvenience. We think we should do it. And I think it is unconscionable that we would run the risk that one person would lose his or her life next year because we don't do that.

We're for the employment nondiscrimination act, and we're for hate crimes legislation. And we believe that it ought to specifically mention no discrimination against people because of sexual orientation. And we're not afraid of that.

Now, why is that? Because we think all law-abiding citizens ought to be part of America's community. Now, so I ask you, when you think about what we're doing in Washington now and the politics of the next year and a half, if people ask you why you're

here—in Colorado a lot of people would say you're nuts, they'd say, "Don't you understand if you'd go to a Republican fundraiser that you'd get a great tax cut right now? Why are you here?"

Tell them because the country is better off, because we changed the direction of the country, and you want America to go forward into the new century together.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:55 a.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to Senator Dianne Feinstein's husband, Richard Blum, who cohosted the picnic; Representative Mark Udall's wife, Margaret L. Fox; former Gov. Roy Romer of Colorado, general chair, Democratic National Committee, and his wife, Bea; and journalist Susan Page, USA Today.

Remarks Following a Democratic National Committee Picnic and an Exchange With Reporters in Aspen *July 24, 1999*

Death of King Hassan II of Morocco

The President. Let me, again, offer my condolences to the family of His Majesty King Hassan of Morocco and to the people of Morocco. As all of you know, Hillary and I are going to the funeral. His Majesty was a friend of the United States for a very long time and a friend of the Middle East peace process. He also worked very hard to reconcile the differences among the Moroccan people, within Morocco, and therefore, to set an example of the kind of thing that all of us should be doing and certainly there should be more of in the Middle East.

He was particularly gracious to Hillary and other members of our family. And after she went to see him recently, Morocco once again manifested its friendship to the United States by standing with us on human rights issues in ways that had not been the case before.

So I feel very, very grateful that the United States had a partner and friend like King Hassan, and I considered him a personal friend. And I am grateful for the many kindnesses he extended to me and to our family. And so I'm looking forward to going to Morocco for the funeral and to seeing the

new King. I talked with him on the phone; I wished him well. We had met before, and I have high hopes for our continuing successful endeavors for both his partners and for the peace process.

President Hafiz al-Asad of Syria

Q. Do you expect to meet with King Asad while you're there?

The President. With President Asad from Syria?

Q. President Asad, yes, I'm sorry.

The President. No, it's okay. I don't know yet whether he is coming; I don't know who all is coming. But I will be on the ground for a few hours, as all of you know. We'll have to stay, I think, 5 hours after the service is over, and so I'll have an opportunity to see a number of people, and I'll do what I can to make the best use of the time. And as soon as I know with whom I'll be meeting, I'll let you know. I just don't know yet.

Morocco and the Middle East Peace Process

Q. Is this part of a changing of the guard, sir, in the Middle East, between King Hussein and the elections?

The President. Well, there is some change. You know, some of it is the rhythm of politics and some of it is the rhythm of life. King Hussein and King Hassan both had health problems and had had long and distinguished tenures. And that happens, you know. Everybody's time runs out. Mine does, too.

But I think the important thing is that Morocco has been a model of reconciliation within the country and a model of partnership and friendship for peace in the Middle East. And I think that direction will continue. That's the really important thing for me, that this change be a positive thing for the people of Morocco and for the people of the region. And I'm going to do everything I can to be a good friend to the new King and to the country.

Press Secretary Joe Lockhart. Thank you very much.

The President. Thank you.

Michael Jordan

Q. Who told you you were Michael Jordan?

The President. One of my Republican friends was being crude. That's what I said to him. I said no one in their right mind could compare me to Michael Jordan. Well, he said, "I meant it only in the political context." [Laughter] I said, "I can't jump 4 inches. I have a vertical jump of about 4 inches."

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:10 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to King Mohammed VI, successor to King Hassan II; and former NBA Chicago Bull Michael Jordan. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Luncheon in Aspen

July 24, 1999

Thank you. Thank you very much. Well, first of all, I'm sorry that there's some people out there under umbrellas. I'm tempted to say, thank you very much; we're right; they're wrong; thanks for the money; go out and work hard; goodbye. [Laughter] But what the heck. [Laughter]

I'd like to thank all the Members of Congress and the members of the administration who are here, and all the people from the DNC. I'd like to thank the people who served our food, and I'd like to thank these young people who provided such wonderful music for us. Thank you very much.

But I would especially like to thank Mel and Bren for making the extraordinary effort, first of all, to have this event, and secondly, to change it around. And it's been perfectly beautiful. Thank you so much. I'm grateful to you.

I appreciate very much the support that so many of you have given us over the years, to me and to Hillary, to the Vice President and Tipper, to all of our administration, the chance you've given us to make this a better country. I will try to be as brief as I can here, but I want you to think about this question: What will you say tomorrow if someone asks you why you were here today? And will it be a good reason for them to join you politically? And is it something that will sustain

your efforts as you talk to your friends and neighbors over the next year and a half? That's really important to me.

You know, yesterday, when Hillary and I had the privilege to go as friends and as representatives of the United States to the memorial service for John Kennedy, Jr., and Carolyn Bessette, I, like everyone, was profoundly moved by the eulogy that Senator Kennedy gave, the last sentence of which was, "Like his father, he had every gift but length of life." I say that not to be morbid, but to remind us all that life is fleeting and fragile.

When I was a boy growing up, I was obsessed with the fact that my own father had died at 29, before I was born. These things don't affect families evenly; there is no rhyme or reason to it. But they serve as a reminder to those of us who are privileged to get up for yet another day of life that there are responsibilities associated with good fortune, and the way we can honor our loved ones who aren't here and honor those who have given so much to our country whose time was cut short is to be good citizens and to be visionaries and to remember that even the oldest people on Earth last a very short time in the grand scheme of things. So it always pays to think about tomorrow.

When I ran for President, I did so because—not because I had any hostility of the kind we had become so used to in politics to the then administration. I actually like President Bush very much personally. I had a lot of friends in the administration. I often represented the Democratic Governors in negotiations with them. I did it because I thought the ideas that were driving the policies were wrong and because there was no animating vision to get this country into the 21st century.

And I hope very much that all that we're seeing now is some indication that we are about to return to that sort of politics, that we can actually have an honest debate about whether—not whether somebody is a good or a bad person, but whether they have good or bad ideas and what the consequences will be.

But I would like to say, if someone asks you why you were here, the first thing you ought to say is that the Clinton-Gore admin-

istration came to power with certain ideas that were different from the ideas that had been put forward in the past: that Government was neither the enemy, nor the solution, but should be a partner in creating the conditions and giving people the tools empowering them to make the most of their own lives; that we had to reduce the deficit and we could do it and still increase our investment in critical areas like education; that we could grow the economy and improve the environment; that it was not necessary for people to choose between being successful as workers and being successful as parents. Those are just some of the things that we said we believed.

And what you can say is, "Hey, they came in; they put their ideas into action, and they worked. So the first reason I showed up is it worked, and it was different."

I said before, I will say again, I'm so gratified whenever someone comes up and says they think I've done a good job as President and they think I've been able to involve the American people in this; I'm grateful. But I want you to understand, I could be the greatest speaker since Cicero, and if our ideas were wrong, the country would still be in the wrong place. The most important thing is to have the right ideas, the right vision, and a good team implementing it.

I could not have done anything that I have achieved if I hadn't had Al Gore as Vice President, because he's plainly the best Vice President, with the largest amount of responsibility, in the history of the Republic. It is plainly not even close. And I couldn't have done it without the help of our friends in Congress. Even when we've been in the minority in Congress, as long as they stayed with me, I knew in the end we could prevail on all of the great issues. I couldn't have done it without those of you who have helped us.

So, first say, "They had some ideas; they put them into effect; and they worked." It's not just that we have the longest peacetime expansion in history, the lowest minority unemployment in history, the highest homeownership in history. We also have a 30-year low on welfare rolls, a 26-year low in the crime rate. Teen pregnancy, teen smoking, teen drug use is down. Test scores are up in our schools for the first time in years in

the 4th, 8th, and 12th grades, in both reading and math, which is a big deal because every single year we have more and more of our kids whose first language is not English. So this country is moving in the right direction. The air is cleaner; the water is cleaner; the food is purer than it was before. We set aside more land, protected it or preserved it, than any administration except those of the two Roosevelts. We've had a hundred—that's big in Colorado—we had over 100,000 young people serve this country through AmeriCorps, our national service program, in communities all over America, earning money to go to college. That happened in 4 years. It took the Peace Corps 20 years to reach 100,000. Ninety percent of our children immunized against serious childhood diseases for the first time ever. We've had a more active Government, but we now have the smallest Government in terms of employment we've had since 1962, when John Kennedy was President. So we had these ideas; we put them into effect; and they worked. So I hope you will say that to people.

The second thing is I hope you will say you were here because you agree with what we should do now, because we can't just sit on our lead. The question now is, we've spent 6 years trying to get this country to work again, just trying to have it work, knowing that we could work together; that the economy could sustain growth; that we could bring the crime rate down, something a lot of people didn't believe we could do anymore; that we could get rid of the deficit. So what are we going to do now? What are we going to do?

And there are these two competing visions. I'll give you the Republican vision in the argument most favorable to them. If one of them were here, they'd say something like this: "Look, we agree with the President; we'll take the surplus that's attributable to Social Security taxes, and we won't spend it anymore. And so that can be used to pay down the debt some. But we think we ought to give you the rest of the money because it's your money; it's your tax money; and if we leave it in Washington"—I heard this, I heard them on the floor the other day. I watched them on C-SPAN, and one of their young leaders said, "If we give them the

money, they will spend it on their friends." "Their friends."

Now, that's their argument. Our argument is, we have a once-in-a-lifetime chance to deal with the long-term challenges of the country. And if we have a tax cut as big as they want, we'll never do it. We've got to deal with the aging of America, the doubling of the number of people over 65 in 30 years. And therefore, we ought to use a lot of this surplus not only to set it aside, but to pay down—to extend the life of Social Security, extend the life of Medicare, provide more preventive screenings for older people so they don't get sick in the first place, and provide for a modest prescription drug benefit, because three-quarters of the seniors in this country don't have it. And if you set aside the surplus and you do it in the right way for both Social Security and Medicare, you can then deal with another big challenge which is the long-term health of the economy, because we could make America debt-free for the first time since 1835 in just 15 years, guaranteeing long-term stability, lower interest rates, higher investment, a stronger economy—debt-free.

If I had told you in 1992, when I was running for President, "Elect me, and 6½ years later I'll come back, and we'll talk about what to do with the surplus and how to make America debt-free," you would have said, "He's a nice young man, but that's hopeless. The kid, he is clueless. He doesn't have any idea what's going on." But it is before us now, and we have to decide what we're going to do.

We also have to realize that if their tax cut passes, it will require huge cuts in education, in the environment, in biomedical research, even in national defense, which they say they support—massive cuts.

And we have a tax cut that's smaller, that helps families to save, to deal with long-term care and child care, primarily. Also helps us to build modern schools and gives people like you incentive to invest in the poorest areas of America by giving you the same tax incentives through tax credits and other mechanisms to invest in Indian reservations, the Mississippi Delta, Appalachia, and the inner city that you have right now if you want to invest in the Caribbean, in Africa, and Latin